

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000071

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/16/2015

TAGS: [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BA](#)

SUBJECT: MINISTER OF INTERIOR DISCUSSES CT, SAUDI ARABIA,  
IRAN WITH AMBASSADOR

REF: MANAMA 14

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe. Reason: 1.4 (b)(d)

-----  
SUMMARY  
-----

1. (S) Minister of Interior Shaikh Rashid, in a January 16 meeting with the Ambassador, said he had been surprised by the January 12 release of terror suspect Yassir Kemal, but promised close surveillance on his activities. He urged that we move forward on setting up a CTOC, expressing hope that an FBI assistance team will come to Bahrain soon. He said that both Saudi Arabia and Iran are wary of Bahrain's reform process, Saudi Arabia because it does not like falling behind its smaller neighbor and Iran because the reforms bring Bahrain closer to the U.S. He said it will be important to encourage Shia participation in the 2006 elections, but that a meeting by State Department officials with a Shia rejectionist risked sending the wrong message. He emphasized how much Bahrainis appreciated that President Bush received King Hamid in November just after the election.

-----  
RELEASE OF YASSIR KEMAL: CLOSE SURVEILLANCE PROMISED  
-----

2. (S) The Ambassador, during a 90-minute meeting with Minister of Interior Shaikh Rashid Al-Khalifa on January 15, expressed surprise and disappointment at the January 12 release of terror suspect Yassir Kemal after he served just two months of his six month sentence. (Kemal had been convicted after fleeing the courtroom during a hearing last fall. His brother, who was also sentenced for assisting in the getaway, was released at the same time.) Bahraini officials had assured us at the highest levels, the Ambassador stated, that on this charge at least, the evidence of violation of law was clear and Yassir Kemal would serve time accordingly. Since the early release did not appear to be a rule of law issue, questions would surely be raised about what happened.

3. (S) Shaikh Rashid, who is a confidant of the King, adamantly maintained that the early release was a decision made by the judge alone. He said that he first learned about it when he read the news in the newspapers the next day. It was a complete surprise to him. He was not sure why the judge released the two, and needed to discuss this with President of the Court of Cassation (Supreme Court) Shaikh Khalifa.

4. (S) Continuing, Shaikh Rashid said that he had talked to the Bahrain National Security Agency (BNSA) and advised that Yassir Kemal is "a guy we need to put not one eye, but 1,000 eyes on. We need to watch him for any sign of trouble. When he buys something from a shop, we need to know what he bought. When he visits a place more than once, we need to know why." The Ambassador strongly endorsed close surveillance on Kemal and the other terror suspects, saying that surveillance was essential, not only to ensure that they did not cause problems but also to deter others from making contact with them. Shaikh Rashid assured that this would happen.

-----  
CTOC: NEED TO MOVE FORWARD  
-----

5. (C) Shaikh Rashid asked where we stood on assistance to establish a Counterterrorism Operations Center (CTOC). The Ambassador stated that we had hoped to have an FBI team here in early January to provide initial assistance and guidance in establishing a CTOC. Unfortunately, the FBI team had to delay its arrival. We are now hoping that it will come in February. Shaikh Rashid expressed appreciation, saying: "We need to move forward on the CTOC."

-----  
BUSY NEW YEAR'S EVE  
-----

6. (S) The Ambassador thanked Shaikh Rashid for his Ministry's support for the Embassy in response to a terror threat on New Year's Eve. Although in the end it appears

that the threat information was inaccurate, the Ministry's robust response that evening was most appreciated, and in fact served as a most useful drill for our two security forces. Shaikh Rashid agreed that the exercise was useful and said that the Ministry was ready to respond at any time to threats against Americans or the Embassy. He added that New Year's Eve had been a busy day for the MOI, which also had to deal with London-based Saudi dissident Saad Al Faqih's call for demonstrations in Bahrain against the Saudi government (reftel) and the potential for street clashes between Saudi and Bahrain youths (which had broken out on past New Year's Eves). In the end, no incidents materialized.

-----  
SAUDI ARABIA/IRAN: NOT HAPPY WITH BAHRAIN REFORM PROCESS  
-----

17. (C) Noting that Al Faqih's call for anti-Saudi demonstrations in Manama came at a sensitive time in Bahraini-Saudi relations, Shaikh Rashid suggested that the root of the current difficulty was SAG apprehension about the pace of the economic and political reform process in Bahrain. The Saudis don't want to feel that they are falling behind. This explains, he said, why the Saudi government has taken several steps that impact negatively on Bahrain -- criticizing the FTA, reversing its position on the 50,000 b/d oil gift, blocking exports of sand. This is all a sort of pressure to keep the Bahrainis from getting too far out in front. Unfortunately, if the Saudi people realize that their government is not happy with Bahrain, this will affect popular attitudes toward Bahrain, and that could have longer term consequences. Saudi Arabia should in fact benefit from Bahrain's reforms, including the FTA. The Bahrain reforms could serve as a good example for Saudi Arabia, but instead it is reacting negatively and defensively to them.

18. (C) Similarly, he continued, Iran is wary of Bahrain's reform process, which it feels brings Bahrain closer to the United States. He attributed the Shia opposition boycott of the 2002 elections to pressure from Iran. As we approach the 2006 elections, it appears that the Shia in Bahrain are more divided. The government wants to encourage them to participate, but continued Iranian involvement is not helping.

-----  
ENCOURAGE SHIA PARTICIPATION  
-----

19. (C) Continuing on the upcoming elections, Shaikh Rashid said that it will be important in the coming period to encourage full Shia participation. The Ambassador asked how we might do this, noting that U.K. Ambassador Robin Lamb had been publicly criticized when he met with Shia opposition leaders. Shaikh Rashid suggested that it might have been less troublesome if Ambassador Lamb had used the opportunity to say publicly that he met with the Shia opposition leaders to urge that they participate in the next elections.

110. (C) Shaikh Rashid noted that Hassan Mushaima, Vice President of the Shia opposition group Al Wifaq, had recently visited the United States and met with officials from the State Department. The Ambassador said that Mushaima was not invited to the U.S. by the USG, but that we routinely meet people of various political stripes. Shaikh Rashid said he understood that point, but that Mushaima was solidly in the camp of those rejecting participation in the elections (in contrast to Al Wifaq President Shaikh Ali Salman, who is considered more moderate on the subject). By meeting with Mushaima, Shaikh Rashid said, the State Department might send the wrong message. We should not encourage those opposed to participating in the election.

-----  
THANKS FOR KING'S VISIT  
-----

111. (SBU) Shaikh Rashid made a point of expressing thanks for the late November visit to Washington of the King, coming right after the President's reelection. The visit was "very much appreciated here," he stated. Bahrain feels its relationship with the U.S. is based on solid cooperation, and with the U.S. as its friend it can solve the problems it faces.

MONROE